

# Caught in the Web?

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# The Research Context – what we know

**2010 - LSRC research in respect of young people's use of the Internet to resolve their civil and social justice problems**

**Findings were counterintuitive (for some):**

- High levels of Internet access but low levels of use
- Lesser success
- Use and success correlated with education level

**Fit with existing research:**

- Resource or 'toy' (Nicholas et al., 2003; EdComms 2007)
- Willingness and correlation with level of educational attainment (Iske, Klein and Kutscher, 2005)
- Difficulty searching/obtaining information related to use of key words (Landauer 1992)

**Something is not working – research to find what it is and why?**

# The Research Context – what we don't know

## What is going wrong?

### Finding appropriate information

- Getting to the right websites?
- Using appropriate search terms?
- Assessing trustworthiness of information / jurisdictional relevance?
- Cross-checking information from a number of sources?

### Search behaviour

- Getting frustrated or giving up easily?

### What the Internet was delivering

- Could the information found replace the need for advice?
- Was the internet acting as a standalone self-help resource?

**Why is this interesting?**

## The Policy Context – where we are

### Why are such questions of interest/importance?

- Increasing shift towards and reliance upon online information and self-help
- Push towards e-services and single modes of access
- LASPO Act 2012 provides further evidence for this

### In context of lack of coherence / consistency in Internet advice/information

- Digital Government policy has ‘muddled along’
- Third sector organisations currently provide the bulk of online information and advice

## What we need to know

1. Why are young people having limited success?
2. What can the Internet be expected to provide?

## Methodology

- 1) Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey (CSJPS)
- 2) Preliminary Findings from Web Experiments

## CSJPS

Nationally representative household survey of people's experience and response to problems involving rights.

One of the latest in a long line of surveys looking at people's response to civil and social justice problems.

Panel Survey format introduced in 2010 with a Wave 2 in 2011

New questions added to give a better idea of how people searched online, the websites used and how they found out about them

## CSJPS- Did you use the Internet to try and sort out your problem?

### CSJPS findings similar to those of Denvir et al., (2010)

- Young people still unlikely to use the Internet to resolve problems
- Still had limited success
- Most often wanting 'information to help them solve their problem' and to find 'information about their rights'
- Greater success with the latter

### More generally

- Individuals typically located websites through searching and very few locate them via family/friends or advertising
- Do not remember the websites they used, most claiming they 'didn't know' or that they used 'Google'
- Spending between 5 and 30 minutes using the Internet to assist them

**This is about as far as legal need surveys can take us....**

# CSJPS- Limitations

## CSJPS

People may think they remember:

- 1) How long they spent online
- 2) The websites they used (although most don't remember this either)

**BUT...**not reliable

## Online experiments

An experiment was devised in which young people were presented with legal problems and asked to use the Internet to resolve them

*Able to track **exactly** what they did, the errors they made and the impact of the Internet on knowledge and problem solving behaviour*

# Internet Experiment

Remote experiment/survey created in Opinio and hosted online

## Three groups targeted

- School aged participants undertaking GCSE's/A Levels (15-18 years old)
- University Students
- Vulnerable Young Adults (homeless/experiencing problems/NEETs)

This presentation reports initial findings from **University Students**

Participants recruited through UCL and paid £10 incentive

## Procedure

Individuals were supplied with a username and password and assigned a specific 'virtual desktop' number

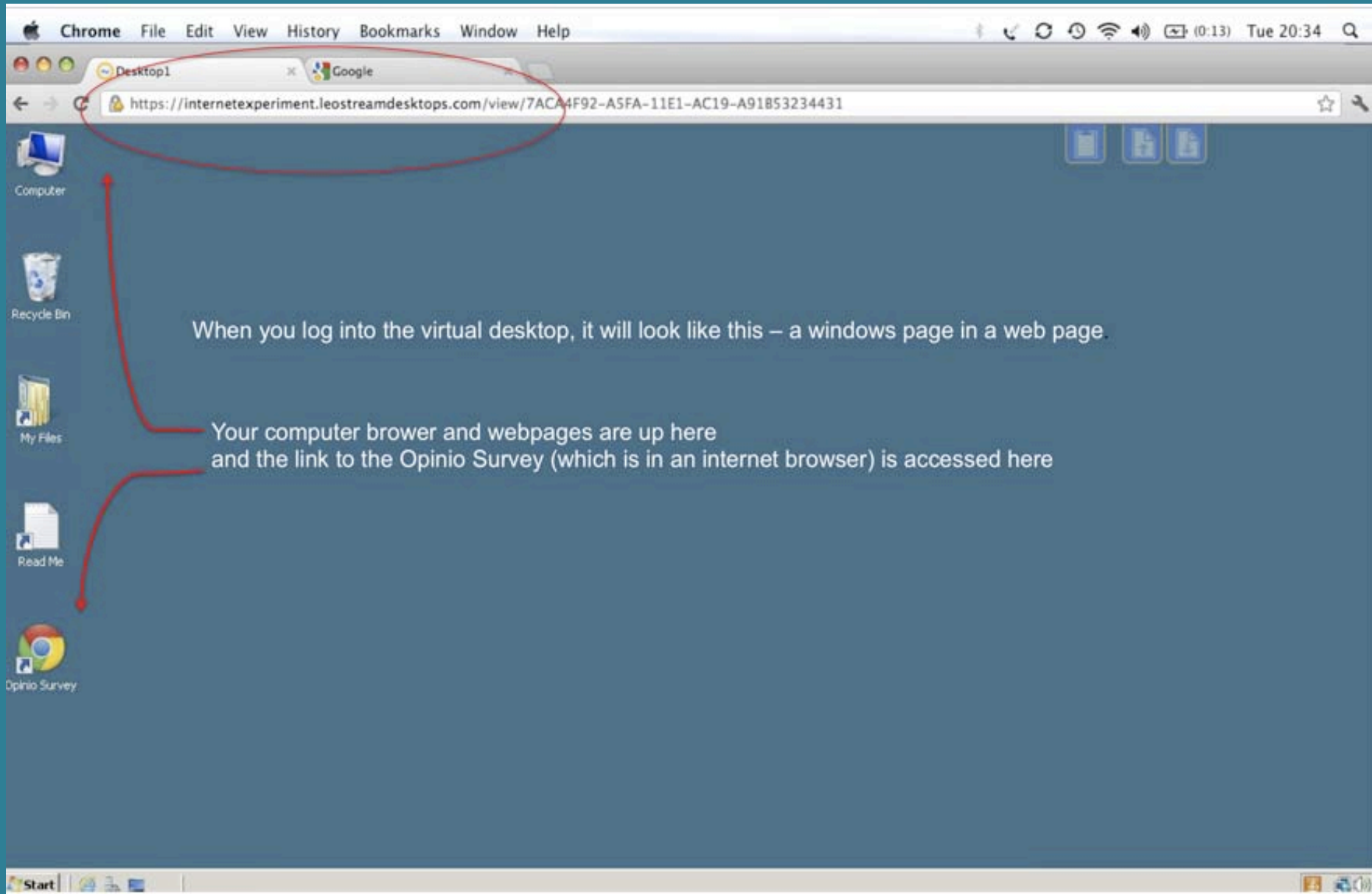
Required to read instructions detailed on the experiment website, log into the virtual desktop page, select and run their desktop, and open up the survey

NO time limit

Treat the hypothetical as if it was a problem they were facing themselves



# Internet Experiment- Virtual Desktop

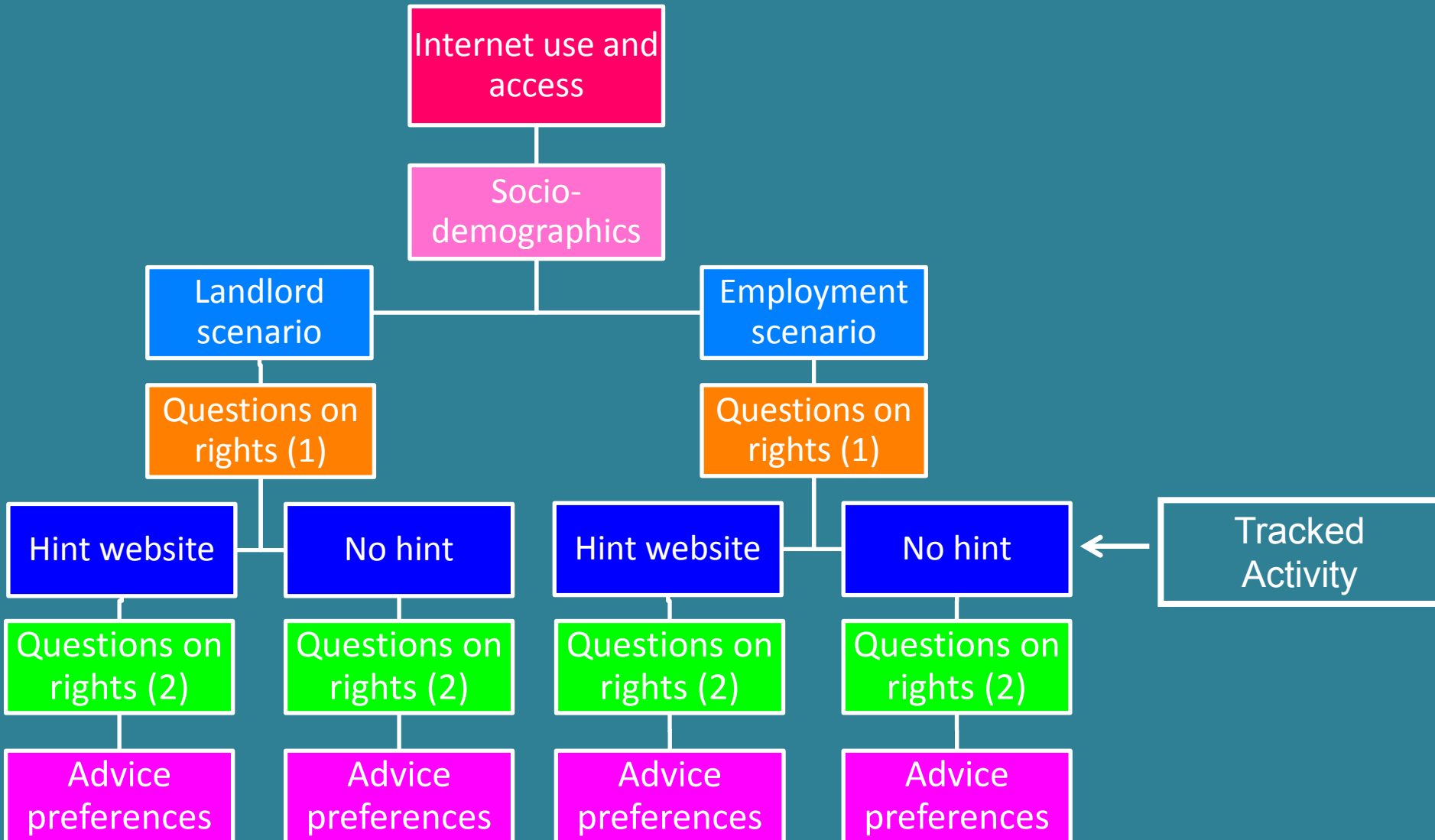


The image shows a virtual desktop environment. At the top, a Chrome browser window is open, displaying a Google search page. The address bar contains the URL: <https://internetexperiment.leostreamdesktops.com/view/7ACA4F92-A5FA-11E1-AC19-A91853234431>. The desktop background is a solid blue color. On the left side, there are several desktop icons: 'Computer', 'Recycle Bin', 'My Files', 'Read Me', and 'Opinio Survey'. A red oval highlights the address bar in the browser window. A red arrow points from the text below to the 'Opinio Survey' icon. Another red arrow points from the text below to the browser window.

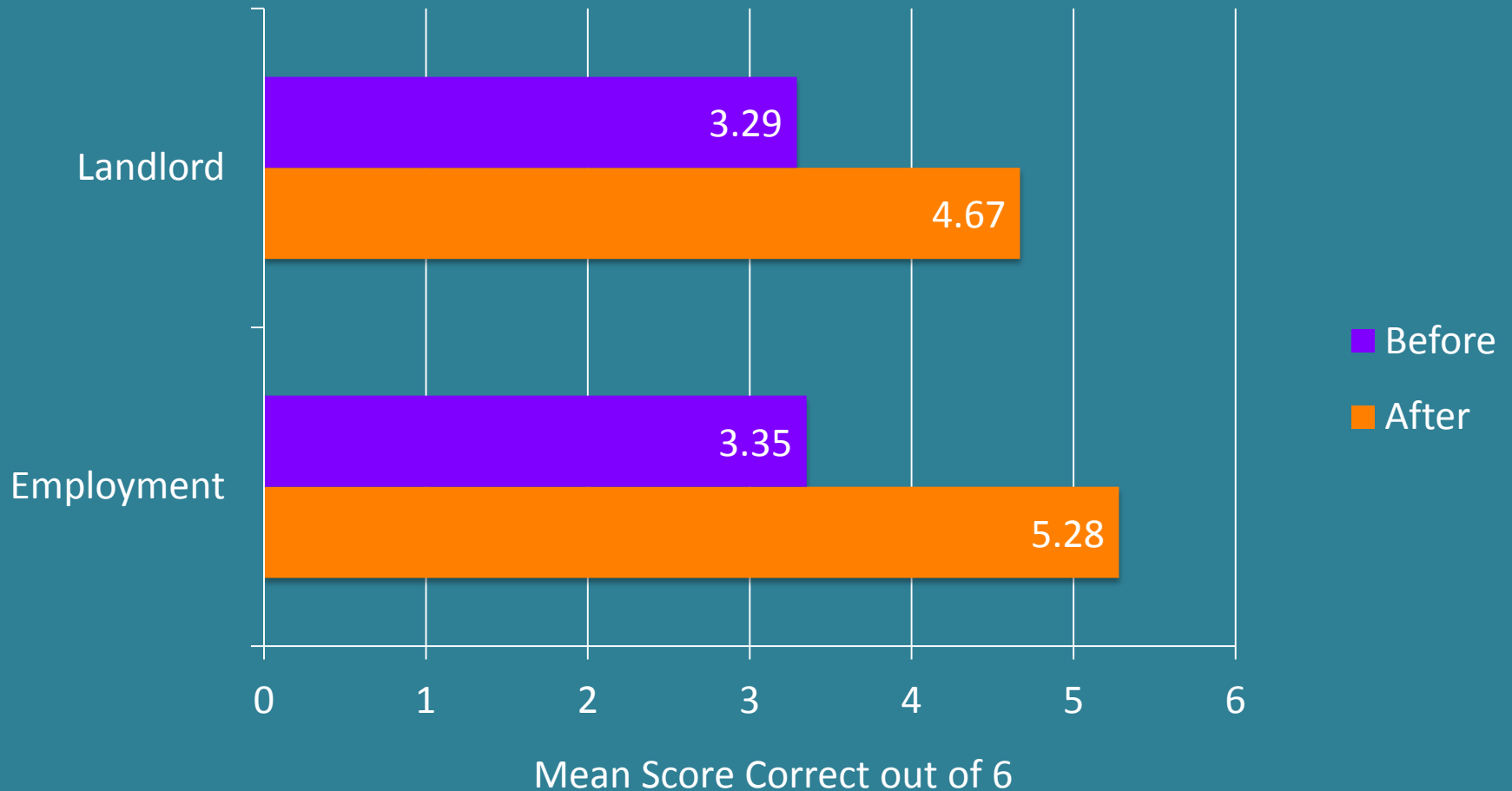
When you log into the virtual desktop, it will look like this – a windows page in a web page.

Your computer browser and webpages are up here and the link to the Opinio Survey (which is in an internet browser) is accessed here

# Internet Experiment - stages



# Results – knowledge of rights and impact of the Internet



**Improvements, but question dependent**

# Results – knowledge of rights and impact of the Internet

## Landlord

- Before - Knowledge poor in regards to eviction without a court order, and whether the landlord's employees can remove you from the property
- Uncertainty as to what constituted a breach of the lease
- After - improvement across the board, but uncertainty about who can evict a tenant

## Employment

- Before - Lack of knowledge in relation to maximum working hours, the minimum wage and who is covered by unfair dismissal
- After - Improvements in knowledge after use of the Internet, yet still unsure as to the rules surrounding unfair dismissal

**Improvements, but question dependent**

# Results – Search duration and behaviour

## Searching quickly and churning through pages

- Max time spent searching 33 minutes
- Most spent less than 10 minutes
- Spending less than 1 minute per page

## Independence

- Did not always use the hint BUT (usually) found their way to the website anyway (particularly in the case of employment problems)

## Made jurisdictional errors

- Some paid little attention to jurisdictional relevance of websites
- Limited search results by adding 'UK' to the end of search terms
- Assuming that all the results procured subsequently were UK websites
- Or later failing to remember to add 'UK' when searching thereafter

**High turnover, structured around search engines, jurisdictional errors**

# Results – search typology

**Frequent use of questions rather than key words when searching**

**Structured around search engines**

- Less browsing within sites, rather going back and forth between sites (often the same site) and google/yahoo - even for those given the 'hint'
- Only a few individuals used search boxes within websites

**Implications**

- Changing search terms simply on the basis of what the google search results look like without going in to any of the websites
- Did not discriminate between trustworthy and non-trustworthy sites (yahoo Answers and ehow.com used)
- Arriving at unusual websites was most often a result of search terminology

**Answers rather than Information**

**Structure around search engines can have consequences**

# Results – interpreting search results

## Order of search results was KEY

- Participants rarely went beyond the first page of results and avoided paid for advertised sites
- Usually selected the first site listed
- Most managed to find their way to reputable sites such as Direct Gov, Advice Guide and (to a lesser degree) Shelter

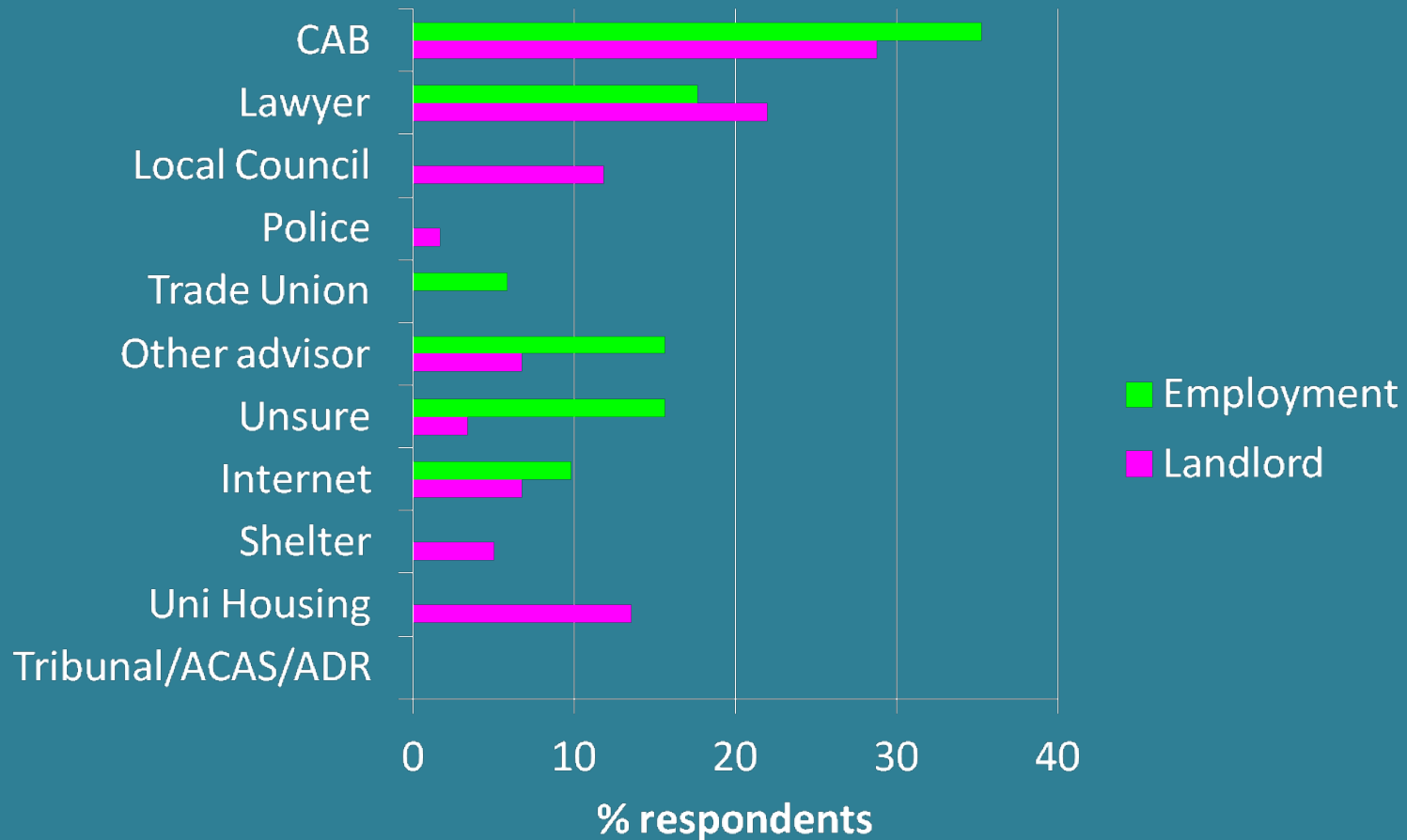
## Implications

- Not rigorous and not looking to inform themselves fully –they did not seek to verify their answers by visiting other sources of information
- Again, a number made mistakes in selecting overseas websites or relying on YahooAnswers

**If you are not first, you don't feature.....**

# Results – where should Alisha go (if seeking advice)?

## Before using the Internet

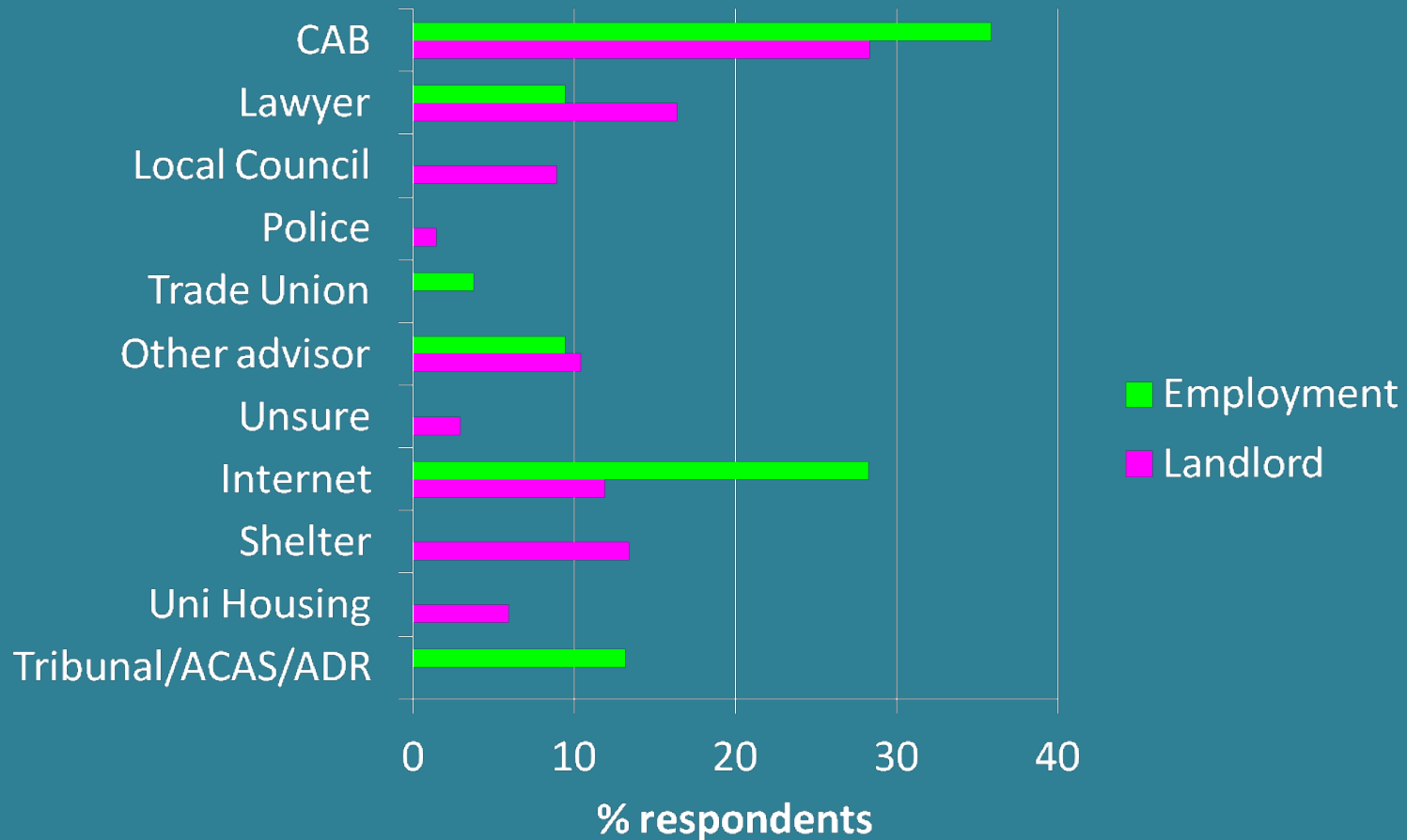


**Broad range of sources of advice**



# Results – where should Alisha go (if seeking advice)?

## After using the Internet



Some changes, though no more coherent

# Results – appropriate action

## Before using the Internet

Good knowledge of CAB and the need to get legal advice

### *But....*

Expectation that there are other agencies/ombudsmen/courts that handle problems within an appropriate time frame

## Employment

- *'Report it to an authority (home office?)*
- *'Talk to a government agency that deals with issues of workers' rights'*

## Landlord

- *'Contact either the police or the local court and explain her reasons for not moving out or letting the employees in'*
- *'Contact a solicitor or ombudsmen, keep any records or proof they tried to enter'*
- *'Get ready to move out and find a landlord who isn't an a\*\*hole!'*

## Results – appropriate action

### After using the Internet

Greater emphasis on informal resolution in respect of employment

Respondents fail to understand legal processes (particularly for housing)

Answers do not reflect urgency

### Employment

- *'Ask her trade union for help'*
- *'She should ask a tribunal to decide if she has been discriminated against because of her age'*

### Landlord

- *'Get an injunction from the court to stop the eviction notice'*
- *'If she really thinks she is in the right, call the police and go to court. Otherwise just move out.'*
- *'Get help from your tenants' association...bring up situation at next meeting.'*
- *'.....She should contact a property lawyer....'*

Increased knowledge of rights not translating to appropriate action

## Results – confidence dealing with problems

Having used the Internet, they were asked how confident they would be handling the problem alone

- 65% 'not very' or 'not at all confident'

Referring back to their knowledge of rights

- 72% 'not at all' or 'not very confident' scored 5 or higher (out of 6)

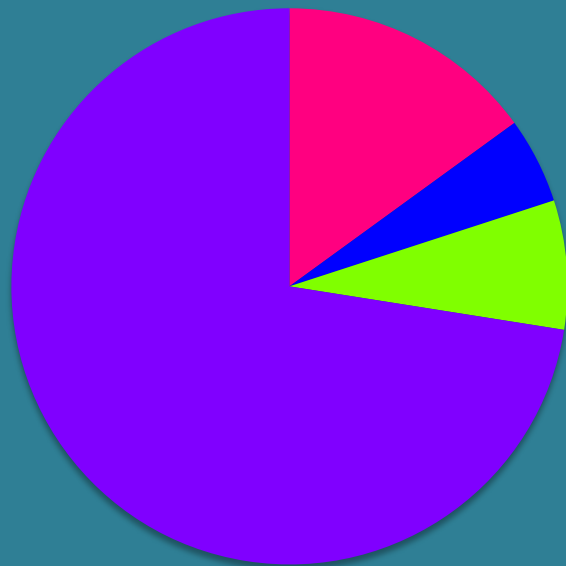
**Internet may increase knowledge of rights, but does not increase confidence**

**Knowledge does not equate to confidence/ability to handle alone...**

# Problem Handling Preferences

How would you handle the problem?

Employment



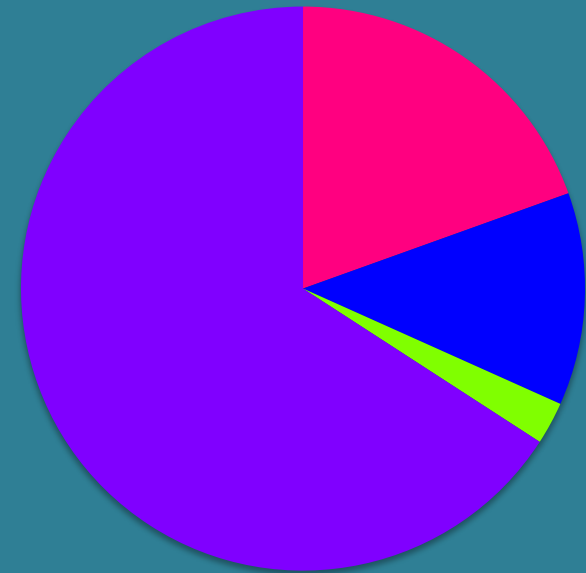
■ Adviser/representative

■ Family/friends

■ On my own

■ Family/Friends AND  
adviser/representative

Landlord



Most frequently choice was because of personal or life experience of adviser

Retain preference for family/friends and advisers

Little appetite for handling problems alone

# Summary

## Internet increased knowledge of rights

- Question dependent
- Many still got answers wrong, despite availability of resources

## Searches were structures around search engines

- Little searching within sites
- Errors stemming from search terms
- Some lack of awareness regarding jurisdiction
- Little attempt to discriminate between sources of information
- Rigid adherence to order of search results

## In addition...

### Knowledge does not equate to appropriate action

- Little change in knowledge of relevant processes / appropriate action
- Internet did not increase understanding of advice sources

### Knowledge does not equate to confidence

- Continue to rely on family / friends / advisers, valuing their experience
- Little appetite for self-help

# Implications

## For public legal education and self-help (in light of policy changes)

- Internet (imperfectly) increased knowledge
- Knowledge does not equal confidence or competence with regard to action
- Important questions remain regarding its utility as a self-help resource and what can viably be achieved

## For design of websites

- The best designed websites will receive little attention if they are not first in search results (and young people did not take direction well)
- Future developments and website functionality

## Preliminary findings

- Problems likely to be exacerbated for vulnerable young people
- 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> digital divide
- Less reliable support structures

**(Increasingly) important role for Internet to play**

**Equally important not to overestimate its utility, especially for young people**

<http://sites.google.com/site/legallifeskills/home>